

(19)



Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

**EP 0 960 611 B1**

(12)

**EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION**

(45) Date of publication and mention  
of the grant of the patent:  
**28.04.2004 Bulletin 2004/18**

(51) Int Cl.<sup>7</sup>: **A61F 13/15**

(21) Application number: **99110988.5**

(22) Date of filing: **17.12.1993**

(54) **Tampon**

Tampon

Tampon hygienique

(84) Designated Contracting States:  
**DE ES FR GB IT SE**

(30) Priority: **30.12.1992 US 998699**  
**30.12.1992 US 998700**

(43) Date of publication of application:  
**01.12.1999 Bulletin 1999/48**

(62) Document number(s) of the earlier application(s) in  
accordance with Art. 76 EPC:  
**94905418.3 / 0 735 848**

(73) Proprietor: **Tambrands Inc.**  
**White Plains, New York 10604 (US)**

(72) Inventors:

- **Watt, William**  
**Springfield, Massachusetts 01119 (US)**
- **Child, William M.**  
**Monson, Massachusetts 01057 (US)**
- **Campion, Terese A.**  
**Enfield, Connecticut 06082 (US)**
- **Tarr, Warren**  
**Turners Falls, Massachusetts 01376 (US)**

(74) Representative: **Kremer, Véronique et al**  
**Procter & Gamble Service GmbH**  
**65824 Schwalbach am Taunus (DE)**

(56) References cited:  
**GB-A- 2 225 949** **US-A- 2 123 750**

**EP 0 960 611 B1**

Note: Within nine months from the publication of the mention of the grant of the European patent, any person may give notice to the European Patent Office of opposition to the European patent granted. Notice of opposition shall be filed in a written reasoned statement. It shall not be deemed to have been filed until the opposition fee has been paid. (Art. 99(1) European Patent Convention).

## Description

### Background of the Invention

**[0001]** The present invention relates to tampons.

**[0002]** Tampons for use in absorption of menstrual flow have been inserted using an applicator, as is well known. Other tampons, known as "digital" tampons, have been inserted manually by the user, without the need for an applicator, thereby eliminating waste and providing a smaller, more compact product.

**[0003]** Most digital tampons are produced from rolled or spirally wound pledgets. Generally, the withdrawal cord of the tampon is rolled into the pledget and extends from the center of the withdrawal end. When the withdrawal cord is attached in this manner, the user can "flare" the withdrawal end of the tampon prior to insertion, to provide a well for the user's finger, by holding the tampon and pulling the cord against the periphery of the withdrawal end.

**[0004]** When the withdrawal cord is rolled into the pledget, however, the tampon may "telescope" when withdrawn, i.e., the central windings may be pulled out of the wound tampon. Accordingly, an alternate method of cord attachment was developed, in which the withdrawal cord is punched through the pledget, e.g., as disclosed in U.S. 5,004,467. These tampons, while eliminating the problem of telescoping, typically cannot be flared by the user, making insertion more difficult.

**[0005]** Rolled tampons may be formed by providing a section of specific length of an absorbent material, e.g. a nonwoven web, having a width corresponding approximately to the length of the tampon, winding or rolling the section upon itself to form a pledget, and compressing the pledget radially. Alternatively tampons can also be made as described in US 2,123,750, wherein the entire tampon is made by forming a rectangular bat of absorbent cotton and felting thereto, along one edge, a relatively narrower band of non-absorbent cotton and then rolling the bat with a mold or other constraining means.

**[0006]** Tampons are often provided with an overwrap, i.e. an outer covering of a liquid permeable material, typically a thermoplastic film, to improve the lubricity of the tampon, reducing insertion and withdrawal forces, and to prevent fibers of the nonwoven from being detached ("fiber fluff-off") during insertion and withdrawal.

**[0007]** Conventional methods of overwrapping tampons, e.g., that disclosed in U.S. 5,004,467, leave excess, baggy overwrap at the tampon base after compression of the pledget, increasing the difficulty of insertion, and reducing the aesthetic qualities of the product.

**[0008]** A process for providing a tampon with an overwrap is disclosed in U.S. 5,004,467. According to this process, the pledget is enclosed in a cylindrical envelope of overwrap material, which is open at the insertion end. The margin of material at the open end is folded over a portion of the head of the pledget, leaving an open, uncovered area in the center of the insertion end

of the tampon.

**[0009]** One problem which may occur with overwrapped tampons is peeling back of the overwrap from the surface of the absorbent material during insertion or when the tampon is removed after use ("peel back"). This may cause discomfort and disturb the user, and may even result in part or all of the overwrap tearing off.

### Summary of the Invention

**[0010]** The present invention provides an improved tampon as claimed in claim 1, particularly suited for use as a digital tampon.

**[0011]** The invention features a digital tampon which includes an elongated pledget formed of absorbent material that has been radially compressed, and a withdrawal cord attached to the pledget. The pledget has, at one end, an insertion end shaped for insertion into a body cavity, and, at the other end, a withdrawal end shaped to permit the user to apply an axial force thereto for inserting the tampon. The fiber density of the pledget in the vicinity of the withdrawal end is lower than the average fiber density of the pledget. The reduced fiber density of the withdrawal end allows the user to easily flare the soft withdrawal end, providing a well for digital insertion.

**[0012]** The tampon of the invention also includes an indentation in the compressed pledget, extending axially from the withdrawal end into the interior of the pledget. This indentation further facilitates flaring, provides a finger well for the user even if the user does not flare the withdrawal end, and allows excess overwrap at the withdrawal end of the tampon to be tucked in. Preferably, the indentation comprises a substantially hemispherical region nearest the withdrawal end followed by a substantially conical region further from the withdrawal end.

**[0013]** In a preferred aspect, the invention features a digital tampon in which, prior to compression, radially central portions of the absorbent material are displaced at the withdrawal end in an axial direction toward the insertion end, resulting in increased fiber density, in at least some locations along the central region of the tampon. This higher fiber density provides a firmer, denser central core for transferring force between a pushrod (applied to the withdrawal end) and a header (applied to the insertion end) during the head-forming operation in a tampon manufacturing process. This improved transfer of force allows formation of more elongated head shapes which are difficult to form on conventional tampons; e.g., the length of the head can be made at least 75% (and more preferably more than 100%) of the diameter of the pledget. The invention also provides a more stable head. Head formation is accomplished with a lower average fiber density than with conventionally formed pledgets, providing a softer tampon with a greater absorbant efficiency.

**[0014]** The tampon of the invention can thus be made softer than conventional tampons, allowing the tampon

to expand more easily and provide higher absorbency. The high absorbency of the tampon, in turn, allows a lower tampon weight for a given absorbency.

**[0015]** In preferred embodiments, the tampon is constructed by rolling a layer of absorbent material. During the above mentioned displacement of central portions of the uncompressed tampon, some central layers of material are displaced to some degree throughout the length of the pledget and project outwardly at the insertion end, to give a rounded shape to the insertion end. The tampon further includes a permeable overwrap material surrounding at least a portion of the pledget.

**[0016]** In another aspect, the invention relates to a method of forming a digital tampon, having an insertion end shaped for insertion into a body cavity, a withdrawal end shaped to permit the user to apply an axial force thereto for inserting the tampon, and having a cord attached thereto for withdrawal from the cavity. The method includes the steps of: (a) rolling a length of compressible absorbent material to form a pledget with one end corresponding to the withdrawal end and another end corresponding to the insertion end, (b) displacing radially central layers of the absorbent material from the withdrawal end of the pledget towards the insertion end, (c) radially compressing the pledget, and (d) forming an indentation in the withdrawal end of the compressed pledget.

**[0017]** In preferred embodiments, the indentation is formed by a pushrod having an elongated, substantially conical member extending from a substantially hemispherical base.

**[0018]** In another aspect, the invention features an improved tampon, the surface of which is completely and securely covered with a porous overwrap material. Coverage of the entire surface with overwrap makes insertion of the tampon more comfortable, and virtually eliminates fiber fluff off. Additionally, the overwrap is attached to the tampon in a manner which substantially reduces the possibility of detachment (peel back) during insertion and/or removal of the tampon. The tampon includes an indentation which, in embodiments in which it is disposed at the withdrawal cord end, aids in placement of the tampon if it is to be inserted without an applicator. Since the overwrap covers the entire outer surface of the tampon, the tampon can include materials which otherwise would not have adequate integrity for use in a tampon, e.g., materials which would otherwise come out of the rolled tampon.

**[0019]** The tampon includes a compressible, substantially cylindrical pledget, including a rolled length of absorbent material, having a substantially conical depression in one end. A permeable overwrap material, in the form of a cylindrical envelope, completely surrounds the pledget. The envelope has a bottom end wall which is adjacent the end of the pledget opposite the depression, a tubular wall which surrounds the peripheral surface of the pledget, and a gathered portion which is tucked into the center of the depression, which corresponds to the

center of the rolled absorbent. A withdrawal cord either extends from the end having the depression, making this the withdrawal end of the finished tampon, or the opposite end, making the end having the depression the insertion end instead.

**[0020]** In a preferred embodiment, the bottom end wall of the envelope is adjacent the withdrawal end of the tampon, the gathered portion is tucked into a depression in the insertion end, and the depression is filled with a material different from the pledget material, e.g., a material with a different absorbency or expansion capability. Accordingly, the way in which the tampon absorbs fluid and expands can be controlled by the designer by selecting the materials used in the pledget and filler. For example, the tampon could have a soft, conformable outer layer, providing comfort for the user, and an inner layer of higher absorbency which would draw fluid into the core of the tampon.

**[0021]** In this embodiment, the depression may be deep, forming a "cup-shaped" tampon, i.e., a tampon which, when compressed appears similar to standard tampons but upon absorbing fluid "blooms" to a cup shape, providing a tampon having superior comfort and absorbency.

**[0022]** In another preferred embodiment, the tubular wall of the overwrap envelope includes a plurality of sections, including two substantially semicylindrical sections having overlapping marginal portions extending from the bottom end wall to the gathered portion.

**[0023]** The term "pledget", as used herein, refers to a cylindrical blank including a length of rolled absorbent material, which blank is subsequently compressed to form a finished tampon.

**[0024]** Other features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following description of the preferred embodiments and from the claims.

#### Brief Description of the Drawings

**[0025]** Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a tampon according to one embodiment of the invention.

**[0026]** Fig. 1a is a cross-sectional view of the tampon of Fig. 1, taken along line 1A-1A.

**[0027]** Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the tampon of Fig. 1 after flaring.

**[0028]** Fig. 2a is a cross-sectional view of Fig. 2, taken along line 2A-2A.

**[0029]** Figs. 3a-3f are a schematic flow diagram of a process for forming a tampon according to one embodiment of the invention.

**[0030]** Fig. 4 is a side plan view of a conical member according to one embodiment of the invention.

**[0031]** Fig. 4a is a top plan view of the conical member of Fig. 4.

**[0032]** Fig. 5 is a side plan view of a push-rod according to one embodiment of the invention.

**[0033]** Fig. 6 is a cross-sectional view of an uncompressed pledget after the processing step shown in Fig.

3b.

**[0034]** Fig. 7 is perspective view of a pledget according to one embodiment of the invention.

**[0035]** Fig. 8 is a cross-sectional view of the pledget shown in Fig. 7, taken along line 2-2.

**[0036]** Fig. 9 is a perspective view of a pledget according to another embodiment of the invention.

**[0037]** Fig. 10 is a cross-sectional view of the pledget of Fig. 9, taken along line 4-4.

**[0038]** Fig. 11 is a cross-sectional view of a pledget according to another embodiment of the invention.

**[0039]** Fig. 12 is a flow diagram showing a process for manufacturing a tampon according to one embodiment of the invention.

#### Description of the Preferred Embodiments

**[0040]** Referring to Figs. 1 and 1a, a tampon 10 is shown in the condition in which it would be sold to a consumer. Tampon 10 includes insertion end 12, withdrawal end 13, and withdrawal cord 15. Withdrawal cord 15 is threaded through aperture 17 which extends transversely through the tampon, through opposing longitudinal compression indentations 21. Withdrawal cord 15 is fastened with a slip knot, which is located in indentation 21, rather than at the base of the tampon, for optimal flarability. Insertion end 12 preferably has a smooth, elongated head 19, with head length L (Fig. 1a) approximately 150% of pledget diameter D. This provides an elliptical or "bullet" shape for optimal ease of insertion. Other head shapes may be used in some aspects of the invention, e.g., conventional domed head shapes (in which head length L is only 50% of diameter D). The tampon also preferably includes longitudinal compression indentations 21.

**[0041]** An axial indentation 23 is defined in the withdrawal end 13 of the tampon. A preferred shape for this indentation is shown in Fig. 1a. As shown, the indentation comprises a substantially conical region 25, terminating at the withdrawal end in a substantially hemispherical region 27. Conical region 25 allows the indentation to extend further into the interior of the tampon than would be possible if the indentation were entirely hemispherical, thereby improving the softness of the withdrawal end. Conical region 25 also allows excess overwrap material at the withdrawal end to be securely tucked in. Hemispherical region 27 provides a finger indent or well which is better dimensioned for a user's finger than if the indentation were entirely conical. Taper region 26, around the circumference of the hemispherical region, results from the outer layers of the rolled pledget being pulled inward by the adjoining inner layers as the inner layers are displaced.

**[0042]** Referring to Figs. 2 and 2a, the tampon of Figs. 1 and 1a is shown after flaring. The absorbent material at the withdrawal end has been spread out by the user, forming a flare 28, and the indentation has expanded to provide a finger indent 29. The user is thus provided with

a large, soft area for digital insertion.

**[0043]** Any conventional absorbent material is suitable for use in the tampon of the invention. Preferred absorbent materials are selected from the group consisting of cellulosic fibers, cotton fibers, rayon fibers and blends thereof. The fiber density of the absorbent material is greater in the vicinity of the insertion end than in the vicinity of the withdrawal end, so that the withdrawal end is soft and easy to manipulate, while the insertion end is hard and stable for ease of manufacturing (head forming) and comfortable insertion. This density differential is preferably accomplished by displacing a portion of the absorbent material of the uncompressed pledget from the withdrawal end toward the insertion end.

**[0044]** A preferred method of forming a tampon of the invention is shown schematically in Figs. 3a-3f. First, an uncompressed pledget 30 of rolled absorbent material 31 is provided (Fig. 3a). The pledget can be rolled using conventional winding equipment, e.g. those available from Karl Ruggli AG, Fisibach, Switzerland, or the "Falu" made by K. Fassbind-Ludwig & Co., Fulu Machinbau, Wagen Bei Jona, Switzerland.

**[0045]** Next, a sheet of overwrap material 32 is placed adjacent a first end 34 of the pledget, and folded around a portion of the pledget (Fig. 3b), preferably in the form of an envelope as described in U.S. Patent 5,004,467. The overwrap material may be a permeable thermoplastic, e.g., polypropylene, polyethylene, or blends thereof, or may be a fabric or a non-woven. (If a tampon without overwrap is desired, this step may be omitted.)

**[0046]** Referring again to Fig. 3b, a portion 36 of the absorbent material at the first end is displaced by pressing the pledget onto a conical die 38, shown in detail in Figs. 4 and 4a, or, alternatively, by pressing the conical die into the pledget. The displacement of material at the first end creates a conical depression 39 in the first end. The pledget may be pressed onto the conical die simultaneously with formation of the overwrap envelope, as shown, or after formation of the envelope. Preferably, at least a portion of the opposite end of the pledget is unrestrained during this step, e.g. by providing a cavity 35 in the ram 37 which urges the pledget against the conical die, as shown, to allow material 38 at the opposite end to be pushed up by the material which is being displaced. More preferably, about one third of the volume which is displaced from the first end is allowed to be pushed up at the opposite end. This pushed up material generally aids in head formation. A cross-sectional view of an uncompressed pledget, subsequent to application of the overwrap and formation of the depression, is shown in Fig. 6.

**[0047]** The pledget is next compressed (Fig. 3c) and heat conditioned (Fig. 3d) in a conventional manner. Compression pressures are well known in the art. Heat conditioning time and temperature will be determined based on head formation requirements, the moisture of the absorbent material used, production speed constraints, whether an overwrap material is used, and, if

so, what type of overwrap material. Optimal time and temperature can be readily determined by one skilled in the art.

**[0048]** The compressed pledget 40 is then pressed, using a pushrod 42 (shown in detail in Fig. 5) dimensioned to produce an indentation in the pledget, against a head-forming heated die 44 (Fig. 3e). What was the first end 34 of the uncompressed pledget (the end from which material was displaced) is pressed by the pushrod, while the opposite end contacts the die. If there is excess overwrap material at the first end of the pledget after compression, this step will cause the excess to be tucked into the indentation formed by the pushrod. This head formation step is facilitated by the displacement of the fibers in the withdrawal end towards the insertion end (Fig. 3b). Fiber displacement causes the fiber density to be increased along the central core of the pledget, giving the pushrod a firmer area to push against than it would have in a compressed pledget which was not subjected to this fiber displacement. Thus, force is translated better between the pushrod and the head-forming die, allowing the formation of more acute angles, e.g., formation of bullet shaped heads. Less axial force is needed to achieve a given head elongation, and thus a softer tampon results.

**[0049]** Finally, a withdrawal cord 46 is punched through a transverse aperture 48 in the compressed pledget (Fig. 3f), and secured, e.g., using a slip knot, to form the finished tampon 50.

**[0050]** Steps 3b-3f may be accomplished using a machine commercially available from Hauni Machines, Richmond, VA, under the tradename TAMPOMAT D-500, modified to include the conical die of the invention and to replace the standard Hauni pushrod, which has a flat or concave end, with a pushrod of the invention, e.g., the pushrod shown in Fig. 5, dimensioned to form an indentation in the withdrawal end.

**[0051]** A preferred conical die 38 for use in the displacement step (see Fig. 3b) is shown in Figs. 4 and 4a. Conical die 38 includes conical portion 50, disk 52, and base 54, upon which the disk and conical portion are mounted. Conical portion 50 forms depression 39 shown in Fig. 3b. Disk 52 acts as a guide for positioning the conical die in the Hauni TAMPOMAT machine. If different machinery is used, a different type of guide could be used, as appropriate. Base 54 serves to hold the die in the Hauni machine, and thus, like disk 52, may not be necessary, depending upon the type of production machinery used. Typical dimensions of the die are as follows: A, the height of the conical portion, from about  $1.27 \cdot 10^{-2}$  to  $317 \cdot 10^{-2}$  meter (0.5 to 1.25 inch); B, the radius of curvature of the conical portion, about  $3.175 \cdot 10^{-3}$  meter (0.125 inch); and C, the diameter of the base of the conical portion, from about (0.80 to 1.40 inch)  $2.03 \cdot 10^{-2}$  to  $3.55 \cdot 10^{-2}$  meter.

**[0052]** A preferred pushrod 42, for use in the indentation step (see Fig. 3e) is shown in Fig. 5. Pushrod 42 preferably comprises conical portion 56 and hemispher-

ical portion 58, which form, respectively, conical region 25 and hemispherical region 27 in the compressed pledget, as shown in Fig. 1A. Hemispherical portion 58 optionally is mounted on cylindrical base 60. Preferred dimensions of the pushrod are as follows: A, the radius of curvature of the hemispherical portion, from  $2.54 \cdot 10^{-3}$  to  $5.08 \cdot 10^{-3}$  meter (0.10 to 0.20 inch); B, the height of the cylindrical base, about  $1.27 \cdot 10^{-3}$  meter (0.05 inch); C, the height of the pushrod from the base of the hemispherical portion to the base of the hemispherical tip of the conical portion, from  $7.62 \cdot 10^{-3}$  to  $15.24 \cdot 10^{-3}$  meter (0.30 to 0.60 inch); D, the radius of curvature of the tip of the conical portion, about  $1.02 \cdot 10^{-3}$  meter (0.040 inch) and E, the diameter of the conical portion at its base, from  $1.9 \cdot 10^{-3}$  to  $3.81 \cdot 10^{-3}$  meter (0.075 to 0.150 inch) (this dimension will typically vary with the diameter of the hemispherical portion). The maximum diameter of the hemispherical portion is limited by the diameter of the compressed pledget, typically about 15 to 40 percent smaller.

**[0053]** Figs. 7-12 show further embodiments.

**[0054]** Referring to Figs. 7 and 8, overwrapped pledget 110 includes a substantially cylindrical, rolled length of absorbent material 111, completely surrounded by overwrap 112. Overwrap 112 is in the form of an envelope, which includes bottom end wall 114 disposed adjacent insertion end 115, tubular wall 116 surrounding the periphery of the pledget, and gathered portion 118, which is tucked into the center of depression 120 in withdrawal end 121, i.e., into the center of the rolled absorbent material. Depression 120 is preferably about 10 mm to 25 mm deep. The length of the pledget is approximately 40 mm to 55 mm. Tubular wall 116 includes semicylindrical portions 116a and 116b, which overlap in marginal area 117. A withdrawal cord, not shown, is punched through the absorbent material, distally of withdrawal end 121 and passing through marginal area 117, after the pledget is compressed to form a finished tampon.

**[0055]** Figs. 9 and 10 show a pledget for a "cup-shaped" tampon, in which depression 120 is in insertion end 115, instead of withdrawal end 121. Accordingly, the open end of the overwrap envelope, which forms the gathered portion 118 is also at the insertion end, and is tucked into the depression formed therein. The walls 119 of the cup-shaped area are preferably from about 3 mm to 5 mm thick. The depression in the insertion end, in this embodiment, is preferably deeper than the depression in the embodiment shown in Fig. 7, more preferably at least 10 mm deep, and most preferably from about 10 mm to 25 mm deep for a pledget having a length of 40 mm to 50 mm, or from about 20% to 65% of the length of a tampon having a different length. This deep depression creates a cup in the center of the pledget, which can advantageously be filled with material 123, as shown in Fig. 11. Material 123 can be selected from a variety of desired materials, e.g., a material with a different absorbency or expansion capability,

or rate of absorbency or fluid flow (wicking) profile. The depression is filled, or partially filled, prior to tucking the overwrap in. The filler may itself be in rolled or spiral form, in which case the gathered overwrap is tucked through the centers of both rolls, or the filler may be in solid or powder form, in which case the gathered overwrap is pushed through or past the filler and into the center of the rolled pledget. As in the embodiment shown in Fig. 7, a withdrawal cord, not shown, is punched through the absorbent material, distally of withdrawal end 121 and passing through marginal area 117, after the pledget is compressed to form a finished tampon.

**[0056]** Fig. 12 shows a preferred process for manufacturing an overwrapped tampon having the gathered overwrap tucked into the withdrawal end. First, a rolled pledget is provided (step 1). Then, the center windings of the roll are displaced inward by a suitably shaped die, forming a conical depression in the cord end of the pledget (step 2). It is preferred that the opposite end of the tampon be held by a die or member (not shown) which restricts the corresponding displacement of the roll at that end, so that the material displaced by the conical die is instead compressed. The indentation will be deeper than that shown in Fig. 12 if a "cup-shaped" tampon is desired.

**[0057]** Next, an overwrap blank is placed adjacent the insertion end of the pledget (step 3), and folded into an envelope surrounding the pledget (step 4), e.g., using a folding die as shown in Fig. 4 of U.S. 5,004,467. It is preferred that the overwrap material at the open end of the envelope extend at least about 1.2 cm beyond the end of the tampon. In general, it is preferred that the overwrap at the open end of the envelope extend for a distance equal to at least half the diameter of the rolled pledget. The overwrap material at the open end of the envelope is then gathered and sealed (step 5), e.g. by heat sealing. The material may be gathered manually, or using a machine having a plurality of "fingers" which are brought together around the material. If a non-heat-sealable overwrap material is used, the gathered material may be sealed by other means, e.g., adhesive or stitching. The gathered end is pushed into the depression (step 6), e.g., with a pushrod, after which the tampon is compressed (step 7) and, optionally, the compressed tampon may then pass through a conditioning station (step 8), in which it is heated to stabilize the fibers of the absorbent material in a compressed state. Next, a withdrawal cord is punched through an end of the tampon (step 9) which end accordingly becomes the withdrawal end of the finished tampon. As discussed above, the indentation may be at the withdrawal end, in one embodiment; or at the opposite end, in an alternate embodiment; this will be determined by which end the withdrawal cord is punched through. Compression of the pledget, using conventional methods, serves to firmly secure the tucked material in place. Compression is then followed by heat conditioning and formation of a head in the in-

sertion end of the tampon, as is well known.

**[0058]** Any conventional absorbent material is suitable for use in the tampon of the invention. Preferred absorbent materials are selected from the group consisting of cellulosic fibers, cotton fibers, rayon fibers and blends thereof. Most preferred are blends of cotton and rayon fibers.

**[0059]** The tampons of the invention may be manufactured using commercially available tampon winding machines made by Karl Ruggli AG, Fisibach, Switzerland, or, the "Falu" made by K. Fassbind-Ludwig & Co., Fulu Maschinenbau, Wagen bei Jona, Switzerland, to wind the pledget, and a machine commercially available from Hauni Machine, Richmond, VA, under the trade-name TAMPOMAT to perform the other processing steps.

**[0060]** The overwrap may be a permeable thermoplastic, e.g., polypropylene, polyethylene, or blends thereof, or may be a fabric or a non-woven. Heat sealable materials are generally preferred, as heat sealing is a preferred method of sealing the gathered material. Preferably, the overwrap material is a bicomponent polypropylene/polyethylene nonwoven, having a thickness of from about 0.05 mm to 0.30 mm, and a basis weight of from about 7 g/m<sup>2</sup> to 25 g/m<sup>2</sup>, more preferably about 10 g/m<sup>2</sup> to 14 g/m<sup>2</sup>.

**[0061]** While preferred embodiments have been described above, other variations and modifications are within the scope of the following claims. E.g., the depression in one end of the uncompressed pledget can have a variety of shapes other than conical.

## Claims

1. A tampon (10) for digital insertion, the tampon comprising:
  - an elongated pledget formed of absorbent material that has been radially compressed,
  - a withdrawal cord (15) attached to the pledget,
  - an insertion end (12) at one end of the pledget, the insertion end being shaped for insertion into a body cavity,
  - a withdrawal end (13) at the other end of the pledget, the withdrawal end (13) being shaped to permit the user to apply an axial force thereto for inserting the tampon, said tampon being **characterized in that** the withdrawal end has an indentation (23) extending axially from the withdrawal end into the interior of the pledget, the fiber density in the vicinity of the withdrawal end (13) are lower than the average fiber density of the pledget, and **in that**
  - a permeable overwrap material (32/112) applied to at least a portion of the pledget prior to its being radially compressed, wherein the permeable overwrap material covers the withdraw-

al end of the pledget, and wherein excess overwrap material at the withdrawal end is tucked into the indentation.

2. The tampon of claim 1 wherein the withdrawal end (13) is susceptible of being flared to provide a well for a user's finger. 5
3. The tampon of any of the preceding claims wherein the fiber density of the absorbent material is greater in the vicinity of the insertion end (12) than in the vicinity of the withdrawal end (13). 10
4. The tampon according to any of the preceding claims wherein the permeable overwrap material (112) is in the form of an envelope, completely surrounding the pledget wherein said envelope has a bottom end wall (114) which is adjacent the insertion end (115) of the pledget, a tubular wall (116) which surrounds the peripheral surface of the pledget and a gathered portion (118) which is tucked into the indentation (120) extending axially from the withdrawal end into the interior of the pledget. 15 20
5. The tampon of any of the preceding claims wherein length L of the head is of at least 75% of the diameter D of the pledget and preferably is greater than the diameter D of the pledget. 25
6. The tampon of any of the preceding claims wherein the tampon comprises a multilayer roll of absorbent material that is radially compressed, and wherein, prior to radial compression, radially central layers of the absorbent material at the withdrawal end are displaced axially towards the insertion end. 30 35
7. The tampon of claim 6 wherein, prior to radial compression, at least some of the displaced layers of absorbent material are displaced to some degree throughout the length of the pledget and project outwardly at the insertion end, to give a rounded shape to the insertion end. 40

#### Patentansprüche 45

1. Tampon (10) zur Finger-Einführung, wobei der Tampon umfasst: 50
  - einen länglichen Formling, der aus einem absorbierenden Material gebildet ist, das radial komprimiert worden ist,
  - eine Entnahme-Schnur (15), die an dem Formling befestigt ist,
  - ein Einführ-Ende (12) an einem Ende des Formlings, wobei das Einführ-Ende zur Einführung in einen Körper-Hohlraum geformt ist,
  - ein Entnahme-Ende (13) an dem anderen Ende 55

des Formlings, wobei das Entnahme-Ende (13) geformt ist, um es dem Anwender zu gestatten eine axiale Kraft auf dieses zum Einführen des Tampons aufzubringen, wobei der Tampon **dadurch gekennzeichnet ist, dass** das Entnahme-Ende eine Vertiefung (23) aufweist, die axial von dem Entnahme-Ende in das Innere des Formlings verläuft, wobei die Faserdichte in der Nähe des Entnahme-Endes (13) geringer als die durchschnittliche Faserdichte des Formlings ist; und dass

- ein permeables, umhüllendes Material (32/112) an mindestens einem Abschnitt des Formlings angebracht ist, bevor dieser radial komprimiert wird, wobei das permeable umhüllende Material das Entnahme-Ende des Formlings bedeckt, und wobei überschüssiges umhüllendes Material an dem Entnahme-Ende in die Vertiefung gesteckt ist.
2. Tampon nach Anspruch 1, wobei das Entnahme-Ende (13) geeignet zum Aufweiten ist, um eine Aussparung für einen Finger eines Anwenders bereitzustellen.
  3. Tampon nach einem der vorherigen Ansprüche, wobei die Faserdichte des absorbierenden Materials größer in der Nähe des Einführ-Endes (12) als in der Nähe des Entnahme-Endes (13) ist.
  4. Tampon nach einem der vorherigen Ansprüche, wobei das permeable umhüllende Material (112) in Form einer Hülle vorliegt, die den Formling vollständig umgibt, wobei die Hülle aufweist eine Bodenwand (114), welche benachbart zu dem Einführ-Ende (115) des Formlings ist, eine röhrenförmige Wand (116), welche die periphere Oberfläche des Formlings umgibt, und einen gerafften Abschnitt (118), welcher in die Vertiefung (120) gesteckt ist, die axial von dem Entnahme-Ende in das Innere des Formlings verläuft.
  5. Tampon nach einem der vorherigen Ansprüche, wobei eine Länge L des Kopfes mindestens 75 % des Durchmessers D des Formlings beträgt und vorzugsweise größer als der Durchmesser D des Formlings ist.
  6. Tampon nach einem der vorherigen Ansprüche, wobei der Tampon eine mehrlagige Rolle aus absorbierendem Material umfasst, das radial komprimiert ist, und wobei, vor der radialen Komprimierung radial zentrale Lagen des absorbierenden Materials an dem Entnahme-Ende axial in Richtung auf das Einführ-Ende verlagert werden.
  7. Tampon nach Anspruch 6, wobei vor einer radialen Komprimierung mindestens einige der verlagerten

Lagen aus absorbierendem Material etwas über die Länge des Formlings verlagert werden und nach außen an dem Einführ-Ende hervorspringen, um dem Einführ-Ende eine abgerundete Form zu geben.

5

## Revendications

1. Tampon (10) à insérer avec le doigt, le tampon comprenant :

10

- une longue compresse formée d'un matériau absorbant, qui a été soumise à une compression radiale,
- une ficelle de retrait (15) attachée à la compresse,
- une extrémité d'insertion (12) à une extrémité de la compresse, l'extrémité d'insertion étant configurée de façon à être insérée dans une cavité corporelle,
- une extrémité de retrait (13) à l'autre extrémité de la compresse, l'extrémité de retrait étant configurée de façon à permettre à l'utilisatrice d'y appliquer une force axiale pour insérer le tampon, ledit tampon étant **caractérisé en ce que** l'extrémité de retrait présente un évidement (23) s'étendant dans la direction axiale depuis l'extrémité de retrait vers l'intérieur de la compresse, la densité des fibres au voisinage de l'extrémité de retrait (13) étant inférieure à la densité moyenne de fibres de la compresse, **et en ce que**
- un matériau de couverture perméable (32/112), appliqué sur au moins une partie de la compresse avant qu'elle ne soit soumise à une compression radiale, le matériau de couverture perméable recouvrant l'extrémité de retrait de la compresse et le matériau de couverture en excès au niveau de l'extrémité de retrait étant replié dans l'évidement.

15

20

25

30

35

40

2. Tampon selon la revendication 1, dans lequel l'extrémité de retrait (13) est susceptible de s'évaser afin de former un puit pour recevoir un doigt d'une utilisatrice.

45

3. Tampon selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel la densité des fibres du matériau absorbant est plus grande au voisinage de l'extrémité d'insertion (12) qu'au voisinage de l'extrémité de retrait (13).

50

4. Tampon selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel le matériau de couverture perméable (112) se présente sous la forme d'une enveloppe entourant complètement la compresse, ladite enveloppe ayant une paroi d'extrémité infé-

55

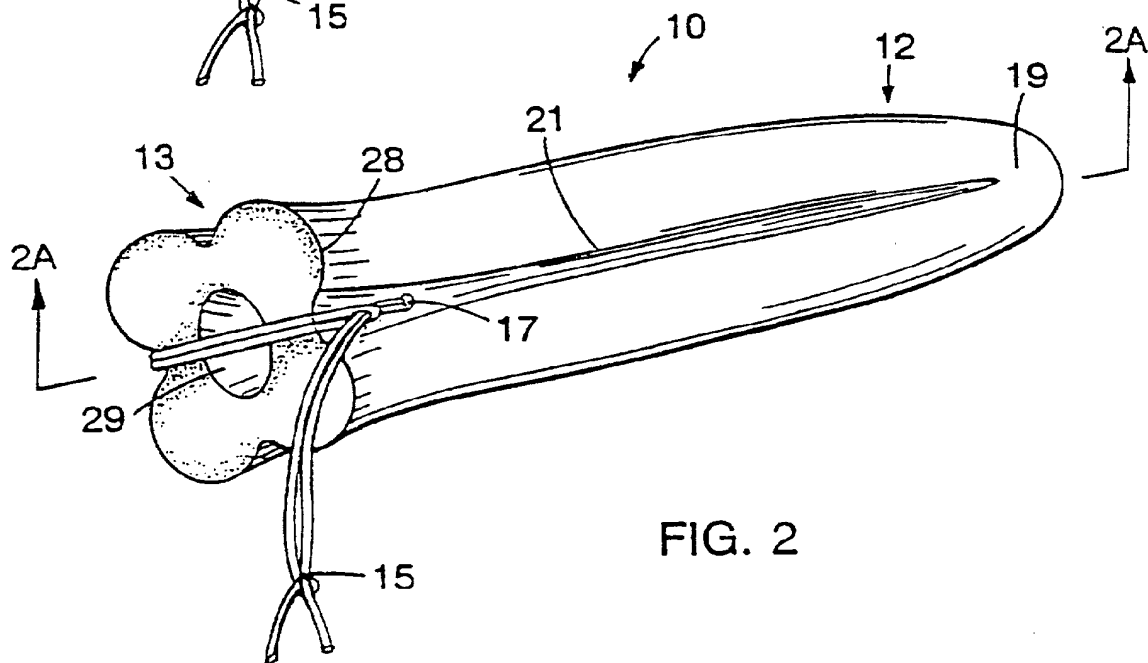
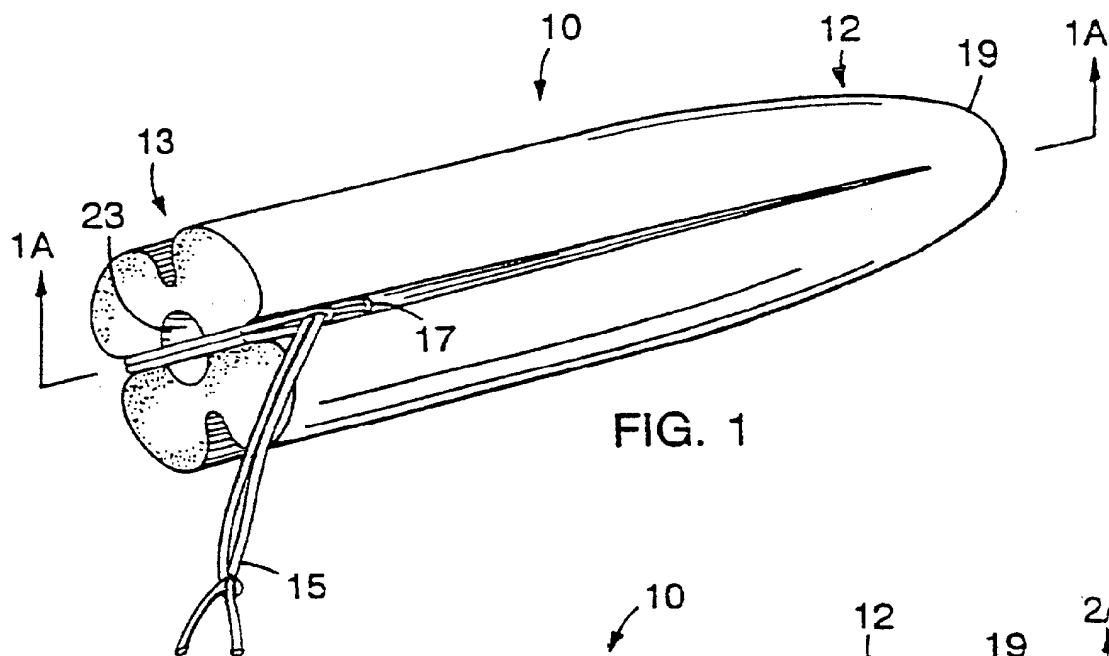
rieure (114) qui est adjacente à l'extrémité d'insertion (115) de la compresse, une paroi tubulaire (116) qui entoure la surface périphérique de la compresse, et une partie foncée (118) qui est repliée dans l'évidement (120) s'étendant dans la direction axiale depuis l'extrémité de retrait vers l'intérieur de la compresse.

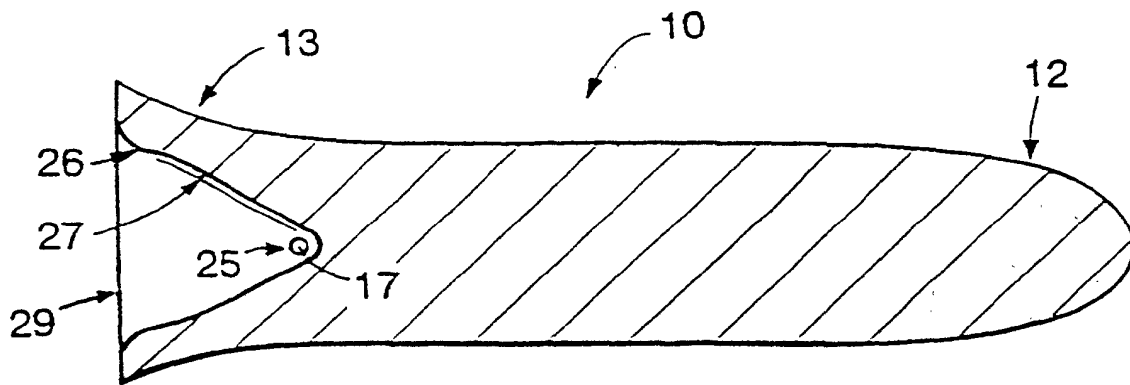
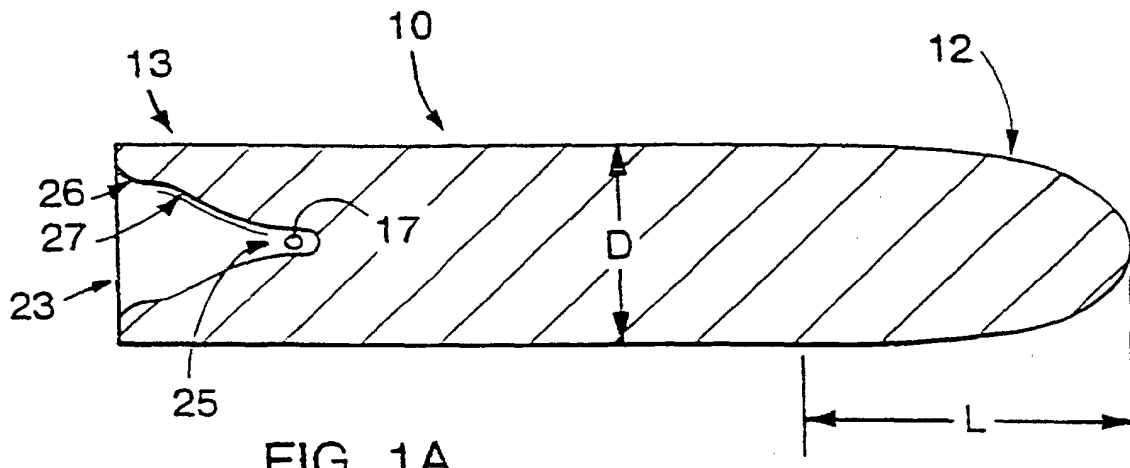
5. Tampon selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel la longueur L de la tête est égale à au moins 75 % du diamètre D de la compresse et est, de préférence, supérieure au diamètre D de la compresse.

6. Tampon selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel le tampon comprend un rouleau multi-couche de matériau absorbant qui est soumis à une compression radiale, et dans lequel, avant la compression radiale, les couches centrales du matériau absorbant dans la direction radiale, au niveau de l'extrémité de retrait, sont déplacées dans la direction axiale vers l'extrémité d'insertion.

7. Tampon selon la revendication 6, dans lequel, avant la compression radiale, au moins certaines des couches de matériau absorbant qui sont déplacées le sont d'une certaine distance sur la longueur de la compresse et font saillie vers l'extérieur au niveau de l'extrémité d'insertion, pour donner une forme arrondie à l'extrémité d'insertion.







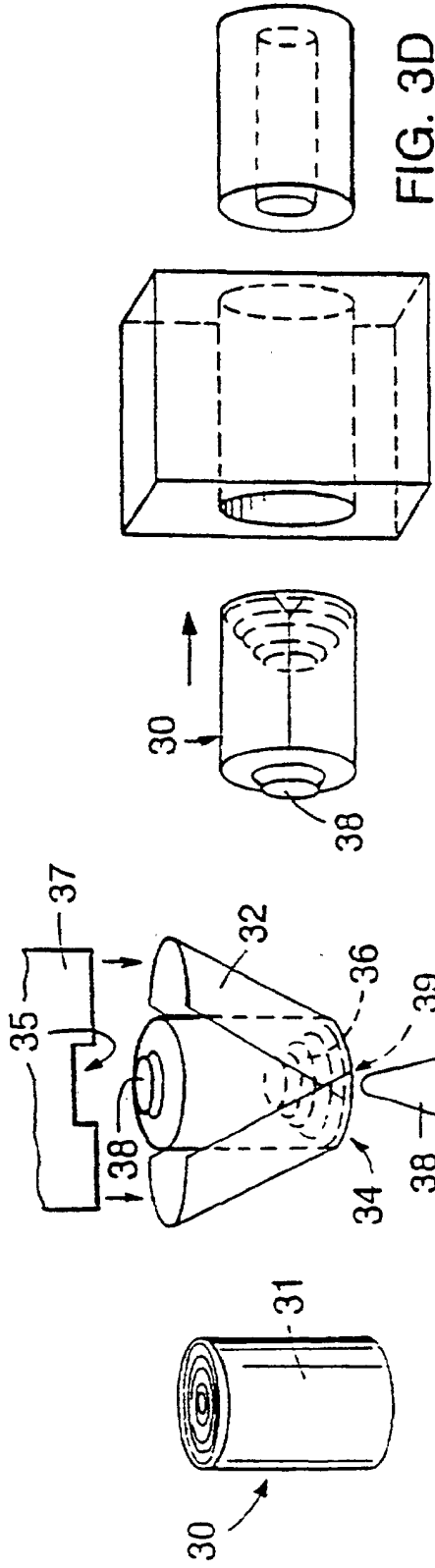


FIG. 3A

FIG. 3B

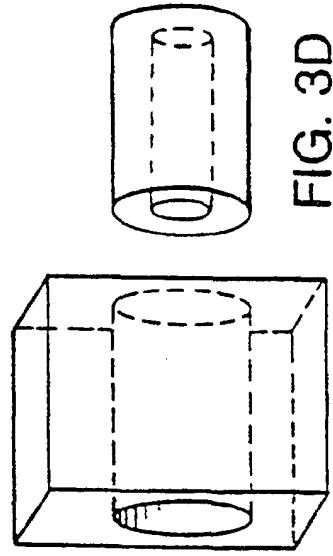


FIG. 3C

FIG. 3D

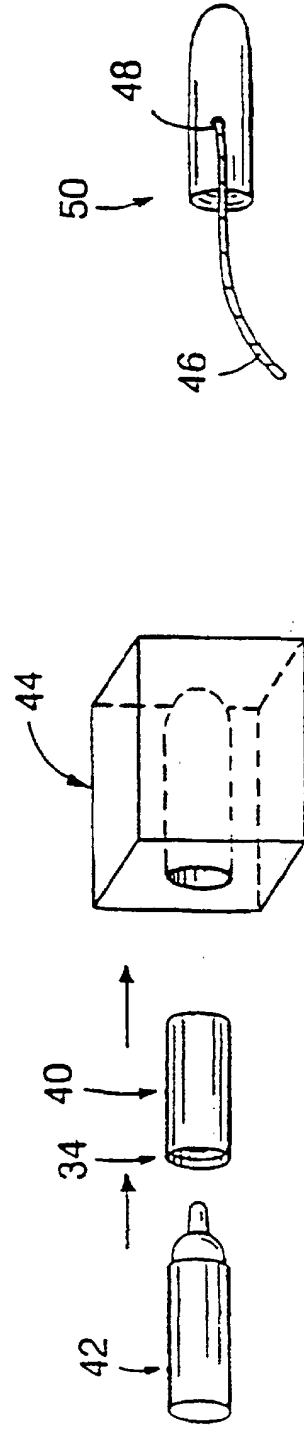


FIG. 3E

FIG. 3F

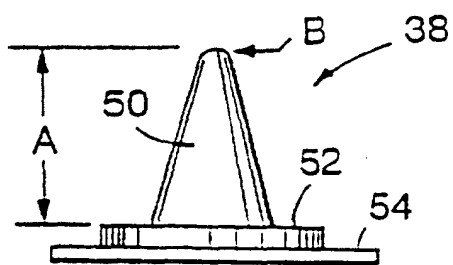


FIG. 4

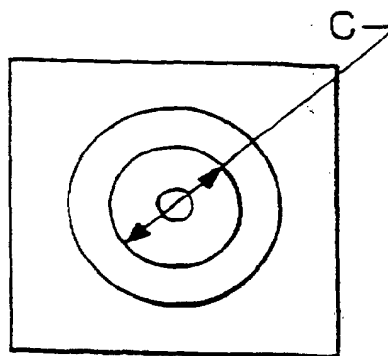


FIG. 4A

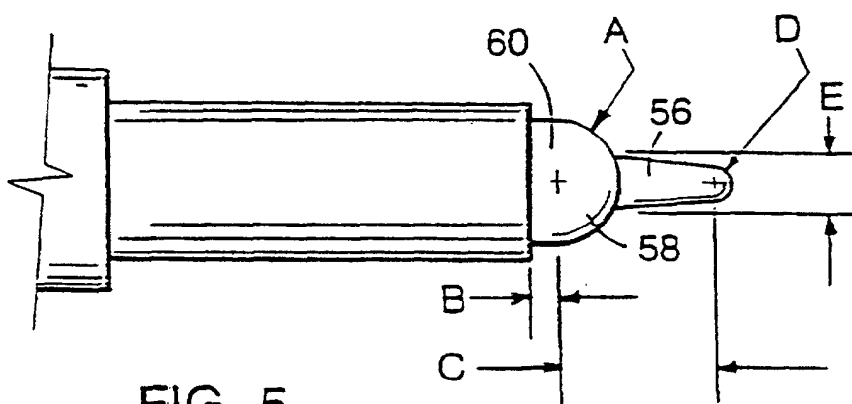


FIG. 5

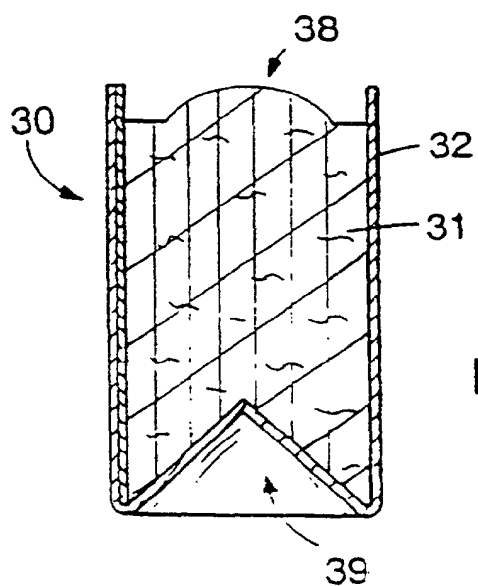
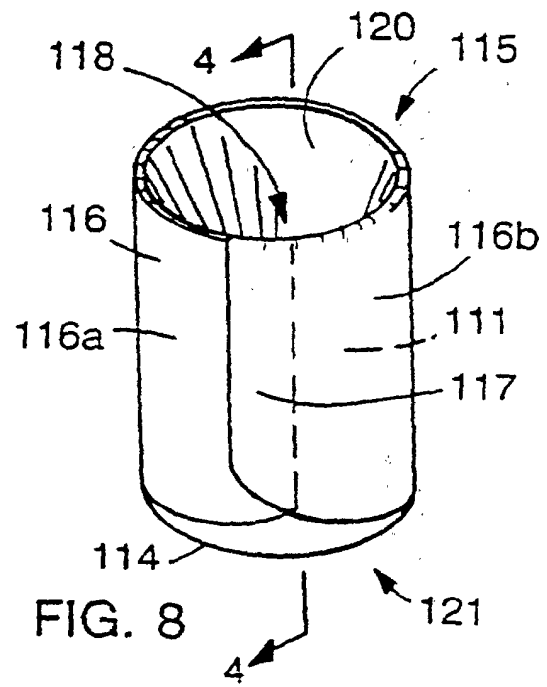
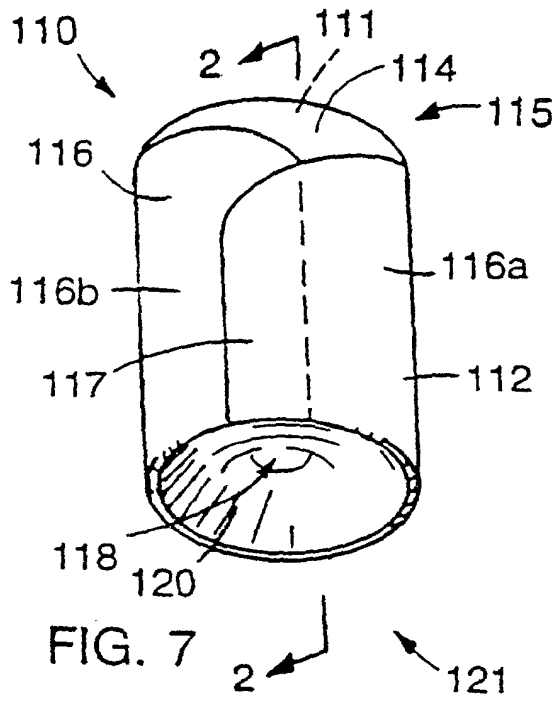


FIG. 6



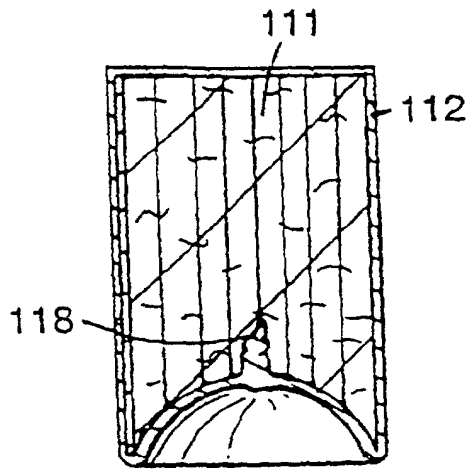


FIG. 9

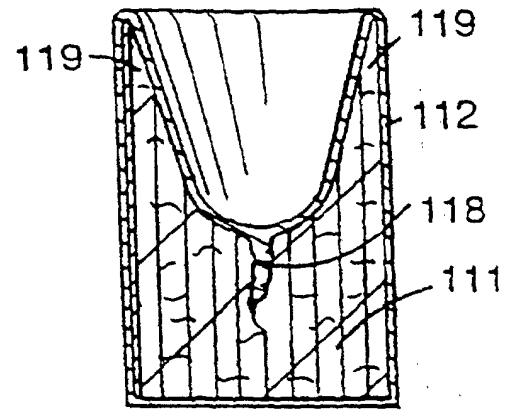


FIG. 10

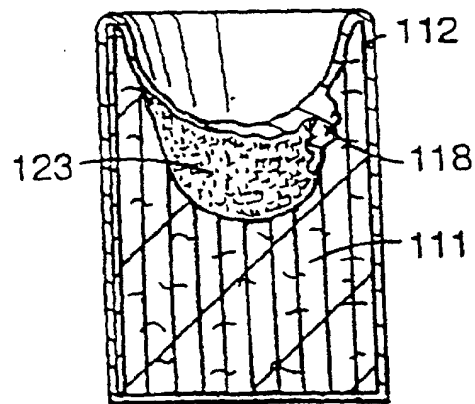


FIG. 11

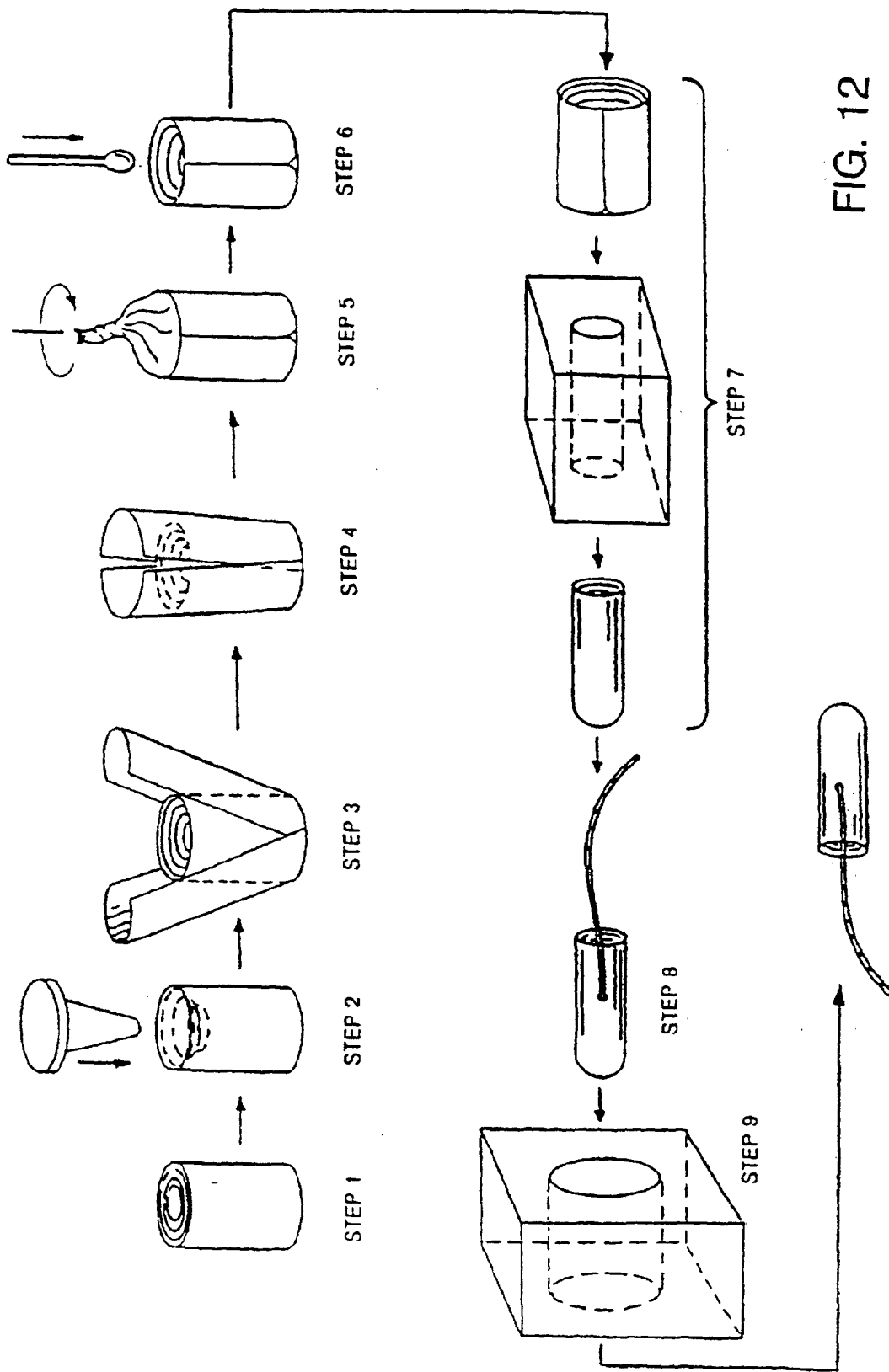


FIG. 12